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Speak & Tell!

Command the Stage with Proper Body Language

Whether you're nervous about public speaking or already comfortable in front of a crowd, *body language* reveals a lot about you *and* the message you're sharing. Award-winning broadcaster and public speaker Michelle Wright demonstrates proper body language to ensure your physical actions and facial expressions *emphasize* your message, without distracting the audience.

TRANSCRIPT

Michelle Wright:

This segment is about body language, which is so important. You already know what you're going to say, you have it all down in your mind but that's all happening up here inside. What we want to do is talk about how important it is, what you do with the rest of your body because the key is it makes other people feel more comfortable, and the more comfortable the other person is the longer they will listen to you. They want you to be comfortable. So this is what we're going to do we're going to practice some things to make them think that you are comfortable, even if you're not.

First of all, if you're a little nervous and you're backstage or maybe you're in a room by yourself before you go meet with someone for an interview or you're in front of a lot of people giving a speech... if you feel nervous. Sometimes people want to tense up like this. At least I do. So a good thing to do is to stomp your feet a few times, not hard. Just a little bit. It kind of helps your body relax.

Another great thing to do is roll your shoulders if you want to try that with me. It feels good, anytime, but it also helps you kind of look more relaxed right before you get up to give your speech. So those are two really important things to do to help you feel more relaxed.

So let's start from the feet and we'll go up talking about the body. First of all, where do you put your feet? Just stand hip distance apart, that's fine. That'll be nice and comfortable. And one thing that I think is really important for you to practice and to know is, it's okay to move a little bit. You can shift your weight a little bit, it makes you look more comfortable, certainly makes you feel more comfortable. It also makes you look more in charge. If you've ever seen somebody talking and they're just standing like this and not moving, you might think, "*Oh, they're nervous,*" and that might make you feel nervous for them, and you don't want to listen, you're just wanting them to hurry up and finish.

So you don't want that you want to stand comfortably and feel free to shift just a little bit if you need to, maybe once a page. Once every other paragraph that's a good rule of thumb for that.

Don't lock your knees. I know you probably have already heard that, but don't stand really stiff. Some people have a really hard problem with that. So again, feel free to move around and shift a little bit wear comfortable shoes. That always helps to.

Next, let's talk about your hands and your arms. So this is the tricky part. When I first started anchoring the news. I was so nervous and the shot, and the camera was about here up, so I thought nobody can see my arms and hands nobody knows what I'm doing. So I did not move them, and my news director called me and a few weeks after I started and said, it looks like someone has tied a rope around your arms you're not moving. And I thought, I guess people realize that I'm not moving because they can kind of see that. So I looked like I was just tied up. So here's what you have to do: You have to move, even if you don't necessarily want to. It will make you look more comfortable.

So here's my suggestions on that: Every other sentence, you can make a small gesture, just do something small like this. It makes you look comfortable. You can put your arms down, one hand up again, maybe once a sentence; if it's long enough, once every other sentence, that's good enough. Don't overdo it. I have a tendency sometimes to start talking with my hands and you probably know people who do this. And that's distracting. One thing you don't want to do is be distracting because people are looking at you. You don't look comfortable at all. So you want to think, first of all, kind of small movements, small gestures.

But maybe once a paragraph, you want to do something large, if you are giving an impassioned speech about something, something that's really important to you, you might want to do something like this, or something like this, but don't overdo it.

The best way to do that is just record yourself and see if you feel like you're overdoing it. Again, small gestures are great, every sentence, every other sentence. Save large gestures for once a paragraph or so, that's a good rule of thumb. Again, everything is kind of subjective, and you can do more or less depending on the topic of your speech, but I don't want you to overdo it, thinking that you have to move around a lot, because what you really want is people to listen to the speech that you've taken so long to prepare. That's what's really important for you.

All right, so we've talked about shifting your weight every once in a while, gesturing small gestures, maybe a large gesture every once in a while.

Now let's talk about your face again what you're thinking about at least for me is I'm thinking about all the stuff that I've prepared and I've memorized my sentence and I'm trying not to think. So number one is my eyes, I have a big problem with this. I don't really have to blink. Some people blink a lot. I don't have to blink at all. So when I first started anchoring the news, I never would blink, and I looked like a deer in headlights and believe me, everybody I work with let me know! *Blink!* The reason is you want to make people think that you're comfortable.

So again, you might need somebody else to critique you on this or you might just video yourself and just see how you're doing. But again, try to blink naturally. Kind of relax your eyes; there's no reason to just do like this and think about this and think about what you're saying. Out of personal experience, that's my advice to you, feel free to blink when you need to, or even if you don't need to. If it makes you look more natural.

Second: Look pleasant! Okay? Nobody wants you to be angry, even if you have an impassioned speech and you're mad about something, my thought process on that is if you look angry, you're going to make me want to move back a little bit and stop listening and... *I can't wait till this is over.*

If you have a serious topic that you're passionate about, look concerned. There's a big difference between looking angry about something and looking concerned when you present a topic to another person, or maybe something that you're passionate about with a job interview. You want to feel like you're concerned about something, that you've thought it through and that you're not going to cause a problem. They don't want you to rush off the stage; they want to hear more about what you're saying. Because you're concerned about something. So practice looking concerned. Again, there's nothing wrong with looking pleasant. There's nothing wrong with smiling. People love it when you smile! Again, that all depends on the topic that you're presenting, but hopefully you'll find a bright light in whatever topic you're talking about, and you can present a smile because people really respond well to smiles. Again, blink when comfortable, move your head when comfortable.

Look people in the eye. You can look down every once in a while because you don't want to just look at them and stare at them and make them feel uncomfortable. Have you ever talked to someone and they just stare at you and look at you and you just feel like, *Oh, please take a break!* Yeah, I felt that way with people talking before, so feel free to look down sometimes or look up if you're talking about something.

If you're in a big crowd of people you can scan the audience and look around as you need to. And the great thing about that is you don't have to make direct eye contact because you're so far away and there's so many people, they're not going to know if you're actually looking them in the eye. So, just feel free to scan around.

But if you're in a small group of people like a job interview for instance, you'll want to look around at every person in the eye, but feel free to look down if you need to look up if you have notes. There's nothing wrong with glancing down at notes. A good key for glancing down at notes.

If you have a lot of numbers, it makes the audience feel more comfortable if you're double-checking to make sure you're right. It makes it look like you have prepared and it's also just a casual thing to do. You've got this, you're relaxed, this is your 'home,' you feel good. You can look down and keep talking, even if you don't really need to. There's nothing wrong with that; it makes you look prepared and confident.

So all of these tips about body language are really important, again, to make the other person feel more comfortable because the more comfortable *they* feel about you, the longer they'll listen, and that's the key: You want to be not distracting at all with your body language, to distract from all of the effort you've put into your speech. I hope this helps!

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